



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

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MITT ROMNEY
GOVERNOR

KERRY HEALEY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

December 16, 2004

Dear Senator Antonioni and Representative Haddad:

The Fiscal Year 2005 budget charged the Early Education and Care Council with developing a transition plan to establish a new Department of Early Education and Care effective July 1, 2005. While I have reviewed the Council's report and applaud their thoughtful and conscientious recommendations, I have a number of serious reservations about the potential direction of the new agency.

As you know, when the General Court first enacted the legislation creating the new Department, I expressed concerns about the governance of the new agency. I continue to believe strongly that the Department should be an executive agency within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. By moving the new Department under a separate Board of Early Education and Care, there is a danger of severing the vital linkage between child care and the agencies whose clients rely on child care services.

Historically, Massachusetts's families receiving cash assistance (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF) have always received child care support in order to work. In addition, those leaving welfare have also received important child care support as they move up the economic ladder. Although the prioritization of TANF families is recognized in the Council's report, there is no guarantee that the new Department will adopt those recommendations or continue to support current and former TANF recipients. Further, under the current governance structure, there is no guarantee that those families being served by the Department of Social Services, for whom child care is an essential service in keeping their families intact and their children out of foster care, will continue to have access to this vital service.

In addition, I am concerned that understandable efforts to increase the standards and quality of early education and child care programs will increase the cost of child care beyond the economic capacity of working parents, especially low income working parents. We already have a significant list of low income families waiting for child care. We need to be careful to maintain the right balance among quality, affordability, and access.

As the Joint Education Committee considers the Council's recommendations and works to develop its final legislation to establish the new Department, I strongly urge the Committee to consider a stronger link and more accountability to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. We must insure that the needs of low income families for quality child care are protected.

Finally, to the extent that the General Court wishes to expand state subsidies for early education and care, we need to proceed carefully as this will consume substantial new resources, and potentially could jeopardize funding for existing education and human services priorities.

I look forward to having an opportunity to discuss my concerns with you in the coming months.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mitt Romney".

Mitt Romney